

The Battle of Gettysburg

The battle of Gettysburg was the first time that the Confederate army fought on Union soil. Both Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis realized the importance of Confederate troops in the North. While the South hoped to gain European support by the Northern invasion, Lincoln felt a Southern foothold in Union territory could very well signal the North's defeat.

In June of 1863, General Robert E. Lee and his men crossed into Pennsylvania. But Jeb Stuart, the South's calvary genius, and the man who had provided Lee with much information about Union troop placements, was not present to tell Lee the location of Major General George Meade and his Union troops. Lee was in Union territory without his most trusted eyes and ears.

On June 30th, contingents of Lee's forces met troops led by General John Buford just outside Gettysburg. The Union troops under Buford held off the Confederates, but soon more and more troops entered the fight. The Union troops seized the high ground at Gettysburg, a decisive move, for it set the stage for the South's greatest and most futile battle, "Pickett's Charge." After fighting three more days, on July 3rd, Lee sent General George Pickett's men up the heights, hopefully to dislodge the Union stronghold and win the battle for the Confederacy. What followed was a bloody slaughter of almost 28,000 Confederate soldiers. Lee retreated with his battered army to Virginia, the battle lost and many of his army left dying on Union soil.

1. Find Gettysburg on a map. Why do you think Jefferson Davis and General Lee felt this was such an important site to have in Confederate control? _____

2. Why was it important to the battle that Jeb Stuart was not present? _____

3. What was the importance of the Union troops holding down the highest point in the battle of Gettysburg? _____

4. Would you have sent Pickett's men in a charge to capture the heights if you had been General Lee? Why or why not? _____

5. In Lincoln's address, he wonders if a nation "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal" can endure. What did he mean and what does this have to do with the Civil War? _____

6. What do you think is the "new birth of freedom" that Lincoln refers to in the last lines of the Gettysburg Address? _____

